

White Paper Report

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National Endowment for the Humanities
White Paper Report

NEH Grant number: PF-50084-10

Title of Project: *Planning Storage Improvements for the Historical Collections*

Project Director: Jennifer E. Brand

Institution: The Adler Planetarium

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Project Activities

The Adler Planetarium's NEH-funded project *Planning Storage Improvements for the Historical Collections* began in August 2010 with a review of the project schedule and the decision to split the initial site visit to the Adler by the consulting team into two components. The first visit offered the consultants an opportunity to collect data about the collections and their storage requirements; the second, a day-long workshop facilitated by the consultants and attended by Adler staff and trustees, identified objectives for collections storage and access at the Adler.

In September 2010, Adler staff on the project team met weekly to discuss storage issues and to develop related topics to be addressed by the consultants. The project director planned the November site visit and worked with Adler staff to develop a primer, which included documentation about the collections, the building, and the building systems.

The consultant team conducted the first site visit on November 15 - 18, 2010. It included a kick-off meeting with the entire project team to address any questions or concerns and to provide information about any Adler changes since the consultants' last visit in 2008. The consultant team collected information about the collections' spatial and conservation needs, and projected growth; interviewed staff about collections access and use; evaluated existing storage equipment for potential reuse; documented existing conditions in the proposed location for the collections management and curatorial zone; and collected information about existing systems and utilities services. At the conclusion, the entire team reconvened to summarize the data collected and to plan the December workshop.

The next phase involved two collaborative workshops, which took place in late 2010 and early 2011. The workshop exercise helped focus current storage needs and visualize future storage requirements of the historical collections. The consultants also provided a questionnaire, based on their observations and continuing conversations, to the Adler project team to complete and return via email.

The December 14, 2010 workshop consisted of a series of 30-minute brainstorming sessions facilitated by the consultants and members of the Adler project team with key representatives from each of the Adler's seven departments. Adler administration and Adler Board Collections Committee members were present for most of the day and the discussions. The departmental brainstorming sessions proved to be a highly effective alternative to the originally planned workshop. The consultants and Adler team members considered the brainstorming and discussions to be very successful, with the project team learning a great deal about the needs and future objectives for collection access for the wider Adler staff.

The final site visit and strategies workshop took place on February 22, 2011. The consultant team presented updated collection storage options based upon the

objectives collaboratively developed in the December 2010 workshop. This presentation included illustrations of potential layouts for a new collections storage facility, the Collections Observatory, and description of collections furniture. The subsequent discussion informed a framework for determining square footage needs, the storage system design, and projected costs associated with such an undertaking. Three different options for proposed improvements emerged in response, with consultant team presenting a new overall layout to the Webster Institute staff, which submitted additional changes.

The resulting three 'levels' of collections storage solutions were presented to the Adler's Collections Committee, which is entrusted with supervision and guidance for the Adler collections. The Collections Committee used the results of the current project to present collection storage and access needs, and their estimated costs, to the Adler Planetarium's Board of Trustees at a special March 2011 retreat that was held to evaluate the existing strategic long range plan of 2005 and to determine key priorities for 2012 and beyond. The presentation and subsequent discussion led to recommendations that the Adler consider the collections storage and access needs as being one of the institution's highest priorities.

In July 2011, the consultant team submitted an updated draft of the *Collections Storage Improvement Implementation Plan: The Adler Collections Observatory*. The Adler project team reviewed the draft and supplied additional comments to the consultant team in August. The final *Plan*, including its presentation of storage facility layouts and budget estimates for renovation and storage equipment, will inform and enable fundraising and project implementation, and will guide the Adler's creating of a consolidated collections management and curatorial zone, and the incorporation of new technologies that will enhance open storage and virtual access.

Accomplishments | Expected results

The course of the project brought a heightened awareness of space constraints and perils to the collection in its present storage space among all Adler staff, the Collections Committee, and the Adler's board of directors.

While the NEH project grant focused on storage improvements for historical collections, the discussion with other departments also led to the discussion of institution-wide storage constraints. Examination of those broader solutions, including space utilization, evaluation, and planning, became a high priority for the entire institution. The *Planning Storage Improvements for the Historical Collections* project provided critical information needed for future storage planning.

Over the course of this project, it became evident that in addition to the collections department, each Adler department faces a critical lack of space for staff and storage needs. Facilitated discussions provided an opportunity to address mutual concerns and

challenges, to develop shared goals among departments, and an increased sense of institution-wide ownership of (and responsibility for) the collections. These conversations also fostered a more cohesive approach to building expansion needs as the Adler Planetarium assesses potential solutions. Colleagues involved in workshops expressed a heightened sense of urgency to protect one of the Adler's greatest assets, the historical collection.

Continuation of the Project

The Adler's application for the NEH Implementation Grant will certainly take place, but given the transition in leadership and the need to develop a new capital campaign, it is unclear just when this application will be submitted. Our current intention is to pursue an NEH implementation grant, with a cost share supported by the capital campaign.

Long Term Impact

The long-term impact of the NEH-funded *Planning Storage Improvements for the Historical Collections* project can be measured in two ways. First, and most important, was the fulfillment of the primary objective of the grant: to provide a useful framework for future storage planning and inform fundraising efforts for project. The second long-term impact resulted in a heightened awareness of the historical collection among a wider audience, including new board members, potential and existing donors, as well as Adler staffers. The workshops and meetings invoked a sense of ownership and desire to improve current conditions for historical collections and increase their visibility, seeing the unique programming resources the collection can provide. The Adler collections staff and Collections Committee are very pleased with this increased awareness, and the resulting subsequent commitment by the Adler board of directors to addressing the collections storage and access needs. The impact of this project has already been significant, and its implementation will extend that impact to millions of Adler's visitors in the years and decades ahead.

Grant Products

The consultant team developed the *Collections Storage Improvement Implementation Plan: The Adler Collections Observatory* based on outcome of workshops, site visits, and input from project team meetings. A draft of the *Implementation Plan* was submitted for review on July 7, 2011. Project staff reviewed the document and provided feedback to consultants. The final *Collections Storage Improvement Implementation Plan: The Adler Collections Observatory* provides considerable flexibility in that each option can work in the existing building or can easily be incorporated into a new building. It was submitted to the offices of the National Endowment for the Humanities on October 21, 2011.